

Attitudes towards Asylum Seekers in Small Local Communities in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The admission and location of asylum seekers has a central place in public discourse in Western countries, amid mounting asylum applications and dire humanitarian crises. Receiving countries usually distribute the newly arriving asylum seekers across the entire country, in particular in small remote communities. Incidental opposition actions by local residents against the siting of Asylum Seeker Centers (ASC) have created the impression of strong and widespread resistance. This paper aims to assess this backlash by examining attitudes towards asylum seekers in small local communities. Using the data from three representative surveys conducted among residents in the vicinity of four ASCs in the Netherlands, the analysis shows a strikingly high willingness to host an ASC, which stands in opposition to popularly assumed public opinion. Positive attitudes towards asylum seekers are associated with higher education levels and indicators of economic affluence as well as contact with asylum seekers in public space. Negative attitudes are strongly correlated with a personal negative experience with asylum seekers, a strong national orientation, perceived threats to Dutch culture as well as perceived economic benefits of ASCs.

Introduction

Many developed Western countries are facing rising numbers of asylum applicants. Their reception and admission are subject to local and national challenges, and at times become highly politicized and contentious (Finney and Robinson 2008; Hubbard 2005a; O'Rourke and Sinnon 2006). The Netherlands is one of the more popular destinations for asylum flows from conflict regions. In order to smoothly accommodate newcomers, asylum migrants are allocated to small asylum seekers centers (ASCs) scattered over the country. This dispersal policy, which intends to spread the burden of accommodating asylum seekers, has regularly faced resistance in local communities. This resistance, however, usually disappears over time once an ASC is established, with social unrest persisting over a longer time period only in a few cases (Lubbers et al. 2006).

Many local residents face a social dilemma: on the one hand, they want to 'create space' for newcomers in need guided by humanitarian compassion and also reap economic benefits from the ASC, in particular for firms providing goods and services and for those who find additional employment. On the other hand, asylum seekers are placed in their 'backyard' which may cause direct burden. Little is known about how response of native residents toward ASCs is shaped in small local communities and how their attitudes toward asylum migrants vary at the national level (Finney and Robinson 2008). This study will examine the roots and dynamics of attitudes toward asylum seekers, using representative surveys conducted among residents who live next to four ASCs.

Different than other migrants, asylum migrants predominantly arrive in small rural communities. The context of their reception is significantly different compared to most contemporary immigrants, who usually settle in large cities. In urban contexts, migrant inflows are not instantaneous but graduate; therefore, newly arrived immigrants do not come to dominate local communities in large cities. In contrary, the presence of an ASC in a rural community implies a large relative size of asylum migrants. Moreover, the population turnover is quite high in an ASC since ASCs are a temporary residence. Most asylum migrants stay in an ASC while their asylum applications are processed. After the completion of the legal procedure (regardless whether the decision is positive or negative), asylum migrants should leave the ASC. In fact, the inhabitants of these small communities are exposed to a continuously changing and relatively large population of asylum seekers.

Many ASCs are typically at the edge of villages. Inhabitants of these villages often form 'closed' knit and culturally conservative communities, with established living patterns. Asylum seekers, in contrast, are totally different regarding their socio-cultural and linguistic background as well as socio-economic position and their daily pattern of life. They are individuals who are fully dependent on public means for covering living costs; they live in an ASC where physical privacy is limited. They often are not very active, just 'killing time' while they wait for the decision. They are not allowed to work while in asylum procedure. In the face of such a tense context, one may expect that there will be regular conflicts between the receiving communities and newcomers. There is very little literature that explores the absorption process of asylum migrants in small local communities, some examples include

studies on objections to ASCs (Hubbard 2005a, 2005b; Lubbers et al. 2006) and the role of local media (Finney and Robinson 2008).

This paper takes the perspective of native residents and assesses how the established residents of local communities respond to the presence of a relatively large number of asylum migrants. In an attempt to understand sources of attitudes, this study also examines differences in attitudes of residents on the local and national levels. This is the first study that explores sources of attitudes toward asylum seekers in a small local context using locally conducted surveys. The paper uses a representative sample of more than 1,600 residents aged 16 to 80 who live within 10 km from an ASC. This survey data is collected during fieldwork weeks of human geography students from the University of Amsterdam.

Admission of asylum seekers

In the Netherlands, newly arriving asylum seekers are dispersed to ASCs that are usually located in more remote areas. This compulsory dispersal policy aims to diminish absorption problems. The location of ASCs is often determined through negotiations between municipalities and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). For a municipality, the potential economic advantages of hosting an ASC are a strong incentive. ASCs are often both big employers and customers of locally produced goods and services. In the Netherlands, plans to open an ASC have initially triggered heavy resistance from residents in some locations, who expressed concerns about the potentially detrimental effects of newcomers on their local community. This resistance can be sometimes fierce. Local and national media have broadcast actions of local groups opposing the arrival of an ASC, such as heated discussions during public information evenings, throwing eggs at local politicians or even setting fire to the ASC site. These reports are influential in shaping public opinion. Little is known how small local communities really feel and react to the arrival of an ASC. Lubbers et al. (2006) studied the drivers behind objections to ASCs using hypothetical questions. They report that there is a stronger objection to large centers compared to small centers. In general, responders with lower education levels are more strongly opposed regardless of center size, while people with higher incomes are more likely to object to large centers. This study also finds effects of neighborhood conditions. Neighborhoods with higher real estate values and municipalities with higher share of low income residents appear to object more strongly to small centers.

Strikingly, the resistance of local residents usually fades away over time once an ASC is established. To explore this apparent paradox, this paper zooms into attitudes of small local communities toward ASCs and asylum seekers after the establishment of an ASC in the vicinity and explores how attitudes of local communities are shaped. What are the sources of negative and positive attitudes? Local residents bear direct social burdens in the form of sharing available resources (services and space) and face potential nuisance as asylum seekers are hosted in great numbers in a village. The forced idleness of asylum seekers, who are mostly young men, is the basis for potential nuisance. Contrary to the costs, the benefits of an ASC are more indirect for residents. The municipality receives more money to spend on local services, so some households will enjoy indirect benefits. Moreover, both the costs and benefits are unequally distributed across households, depending on the intensity of resources

sharing with asylum seekers. If local residents can estimate the burdens and benefits correctly, it is likely that attitudes towards asylum seekers will reflect weighed perceived costs and benefits as well as anti-asylum sentiment.

Asylum seekers usually leave the ASC for larger cities after gaining a residence permit (Zorlu and Mulder 2007). Thus, they are temporary residents who do not directly compete with the local population in the local housing and labor markets.

Explaining attitudes toward immigrants

The literature on immigration provides empirical evidence on a widespread anti-immigration sentiment although attitudes toward asylum seekers appears to be less negative (O'Rourke and Sinnon 2006; Coenders et al. 2012). Coenders et al. (2012) report that on average about half of the population resists immigration, although with significant differences between European countries. On average the resistance to asylum seekers is less pronounced, however, still more than 40 percent of Dutch population seems to have negative attitudes toward asylum migrants.

Literature on attitudes toward immigrants has concerned various explanations for why an individual would oppose immigrants. Attitudes of local residents toward asylum seekers are likely largely shaped by perceived threat and competition for access to public space (e.g., supermarkets, shops, money machines, public libraries and streets etc.), feeling of insecurity and fear of theft and crime. Negative attitudes can also be rooted in more general ideological beliefs that asylum seekers are 'cheating the social welfare system' and pose a threat to national identity. There is no unified theory for assessing attitudes toward immigrants. This section discusses three major explanations for attitudes toward asylum seekers: contact theory, perceived threat and ethnic competition, and Not In My BackYard (NIMBY).

Contact theory

This strand of the literature emphasizes the role of interpersonal contacts, arguing that contacts with immigrants has been traditionally seen as the most influential factor in explaining anti-immigration attitudes (Allport 1954). Positive intergroup contacts are expected reduce ethnic prejudice by countering preconceptions regarding the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of the 'other' ethnic group (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Contact theory describes several conditions under which interethnic contacts will yield more beneficial effects and reduce intergroup prejudice. Optimally, interethnic contacts should be personal, informal, on the basis of equal status, pursuing common goals without competition (inter-group cooperation), and supported by the authorities. However, more superficial and casual interethnic contacts, which do not satisfy these optimal conditions, also appear to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Impersonal exposure to ethnic groups in public space may create a feeling of public familiarity. Different than positive contacts, negative and hostile contact has received much less attention. Negative contacts possibly create the reverse effect, increasing negative attitudes by confirming and even reinforcing preconceived opinions, and are potentially more influential than positive contacts (Vrij et al. 2003).

In order to better understand effects of contacts with asylum seekers, we consider the motivation and location of contacts. Voluntary, informal and personal contacts that often

occur at home or on the street may be positive contacts, while more formal contacts on the basis of unequal status, such as contacts at work or ASC may be negative. Our first hypothesis links the location of contacts to attitudes: *Personal contacts with asylum seekers at home or public space will be associated with positive attitudes, while contacts at work or ASC will be associated with negative attitudes (H1).*

Perceived threat and ethnic competition

Negative attitudes toward immigrants are expected to manifest themselves as the collective economic and cultural interests of the established community are threatened. Another strand of the literature concentrates on ethnic competition theory, which builds on early group identity and group position model of Blumer (1958), and the power threat hypothesis of Blalock (1967). This theory considers perceived threat as intrinsic to prejudice and anticipates ethnic threat to manifest itself at the collective level. Hostility toward immigrants is then triggered by a threat against group's resources or status, rather than a threat against individual. Intergroup conflicts are mainly caused by perceived intergroup competition for scarce goods; hostile attitudes toward immigrants can be seen as a defensive response. The theory predicts that socio-economically vulnerable residents are more likely to articulate negative attitudes toward immigrants due to a perception of ethnic competition for scarce resources such as housing, social services and economic benefits. Our second hypothesis deals with the relationship between socio-economic background and attitudes: *Negative attitudes will be more likely prevalent among resident with a lower socio-economic position (H2).*

Another strand of the literature deconstructs the perceived threat into realistic and symbolic threats (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). Realistic threats challenge scarce resources and the economic position of the majority group. These threats refer to competition over jobs, housing, public goods etc. Symbolic threats challenge the morals, values, and identity of the majority community. Immigrants who hold different norms, beliefs, and symbols can be seen as threatening to the cultural identity of local residents. Negative attitudes stem, in this case, from the cultural distance between the immigrant group and the host society. Cultural distance is often symbolized by differences in religion, language and appearance (race, clothing). Realistic and symbolic threats enhance anxiety and hence negative attitudes towards immigrants (Turner et al. 2008).

Social psychological theories suggest that attitudes toward immigrants are rooted in national identification (Louis et al. 2007) or permanent and psychological distinctions between 'us' and 'them' (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Negative attitudes stem from the individual's search to establish their own distinct and positive group identity. Distinction between 'us' and 'them' are driven by ethnic, racial and cultural differences. The need to establish a positive identity is in this case a major driving force behind forming negative attitudes toward immigrants. Identity concerns are likely correlated with symbolic threats; however, the specific contributions of perceived threat and group identity are hard to distinguish. It is likely that attempts to establish a positive Dutch identity are underpinned by considering immigrants as a threat to Dutch identity. The third hypothesis considers this relationship between attitudes and differences: *Negative attitudes will be strongly associated with a perceived threat to Dutch culture (H3).*

The role of local context

Geographical literature emphasizes the role of context in shaping attitudes towards immigrants. A well-known approach is the Not In My BackYard (NIMBY) hypothesis, which suggests that negative attitudes toward immigrants are rooted in local context and stem from concerns about strictly local interests, such as deterioration of local services and facilities, while accepting the necessity of the accommodation of immigrants in general. Opposition of the local community to the arrival of asylum seekers is driven by selfish desire to maintain community interests.

In its original form, the NIMBY hypothesis is used to understand opposition to a locally unwanted land use (wind energy turbines, highways, airports), social service facilities (homeless shelters, prisons) or new housing. When reduced to its original interpretation of the term NIMBY refers to the protectionist desire of community groups to pass on the responsibility for a locally unwanted land use. The type of land use is considered to be necessary, but should not be located in their neighborhood. NIMBY attitude is, in original form, not necessarily linked to ethnic or racial motives; however, an emerging body of literature suggests that NIMBY reactions are often intended to maintain the privilege and prestige of *white* spaces (Abraham and Maney 2012; Hubbard 2005a, 2005b; Wilton 2002). Community opposition can also be triggered by prejudice and stereotypes of immigrants and ethnic minority groups, as mentioned above. A NIMBY attitude is often shaped by specific fears that newcomers will place a burden on residents and compete with them for public goods and space, such as schools, libraries, shops, transport, parks and roads. Local residents expect that the quality of their vicinity and local public services will decrease, while crime, poverty and education costs will increase and access to transportation and public space will deteriorate.

More recently, the NIMBY concept has been linked to cultural racism, the maintenance of 'white' privilege by keeping out immigrants. Hubbard (2005a and 2005b) argues that community opposition to asylum seekers centers is mobilized in defense of white privilege, and can be seen as a type of cultural NIMBYism. The validity of NIMBY concept has been, however, extensively critiqued by social scientists. The main criticism is that it fails to show the co-existence of selfish desire to resist a facility and the acceptance of the necessity at the same time (Devine-Wright 2009; Wolsink 2006). Hubbard's study has focused only on community opposition to asylum seekers center in the neighborhood, which is the first part of the definition. It has failed to consider the second part of the definition, i.e. raising no such objections to asylum seekers centers elsewhere. This second part distinguishes NIMBY from simple opposition.

ASC offer an excellent opportunity to examine NIMBY from a new perspective in local communities. We are able to test the NIMBY hypothesis by uncovering the attitudes of those who live in the vicinity of an ASC and those living further away. Additionally, we can assess attitudes on both local and national level, to discover more about the co-existence of self-focused desire to resist a facility while accepting the general necessity at the same time. The fourth hypothesis considers the implications of NIMBY concept: *Residents who live closer to*

an ASC will be more likely to have negative attitudes, while their attitudes toward asylum seekers in general will not be necessarily negative (H4).

In sum, the literature suggests that attitudes toward asylum seekers may be shaped by intergroup contacts, threats and competition for economic and cultural interests as well as geographic context. This is the first study that applies quantitative empirical methods on attitudes toward immigrants, in particular asylum seekers in very small communities. Earlier studies used qualitative tools to study the reception of asylum seekers (Hubbard 2005a, 2005b).

Data

This paper uses three surveys and qualitative data collected by the students of Human Geography Department, University of Amsterdam in the framework of second year course Learning Research (Leeronderzoek). In the first week of June, three surveys were conducted among a random sample of residents living within a radius of 10 km from four ASCs in various regions of the country: the first survey was conducted around ASC Ter Apel and ASC Musselkanaal in 2012; the second survey in ASC Burgum in 2013; and the last one around ASC Baexem in 2014. ASC Ter Apel and ASC Musselkanaal are quite close to each other but the function of ASCs and the locations are significantly different. ASC Ter Apel is the national center that covers multiple functions from registration of new arrivals, performing first checks, allocating asylum seekers to other centers, temporary housing some for a while and repatriating those whose application has been declined. It is the first address for asylum applications, together with Schiphol airport, and also the last station for those who await repatriation. ASC Ter Apel is a big center located outside the village (see figure 1). ASC Musselkanaal is a regular center located in the middle of the village, accommodating about 400 persons. ASC Baexem is also a regular center like ASC Musselkanaal but located just outside the village, in the southern part of the country. ASC Burgum hosts about 400 declined applicants with minors who are waiting for their repatriation. The applicants are 'temporarily' housed because they have small children, while the other declined applicants are denied housing accommodation.

The surveys are based on a random sample of populations aged 16 to 80 years and use the same questionnaire. Table 1 shows the response, sample and underlying population for each year. The samples were randomly drawn from the municipal registries for the area. Each student had on average 20 respondents and filled in the questionnaires during face-to-face interviews. Students visited each address at least twice within a week. The response rate varied from 30 to almost 40 percent across all locations. An analysis of non-response indicates that women and older persons are slightly overrepresented in our data, irrespective of location. The female and older persons' bias is likely due to the higher likelihood that these people were at home in the daytime and during working days. Women and older respondents have typically more positive attitudes toward asylum seekers. This results in slight overestimation of positive attitudes; however, when controlled for gender and age, the bias disappears.

The data collection process was closely guided, supervised and rigorously checked by five lecturers, giving us full confidence in the quality of our data.

Table 1. Survey characteristics by ASC locations

Place		capacity ASC (# persons)	Population (16-80 years)	Random Sample	Respondents	Response rate
Ter Apel	(National)	1,850	5,350	653	260	39.8
Musselkanaal	(ASC)	450	5,362	675	233	34.5
Burgum	(Family)	450	17,396	1,998	713	35.7
Baexem	(ASC)	425	11,508	1,402	421	30.0

In addition to the survey (structured questioners), students also collected qualitative data thorough in-depth interviews with the survey respondents (115 interviews in total: 33 interviews in Ter Apel and Musselkanaal, 47 in Burgum and 35 interviews in Baexem); 5 group interviews with separate groups of local entrepreneurs, professionals and members of local associations; semi-structured interviews with 30 key informants such as teachers, managers of local supermarkets, bus drivers, police officers and politicians; about 20 participant observations in public space regularly visited by asylum seekers, such as streets, bus stops, shops, libraries, sport clubs and money vending machines. We used these qualitative data as a secondary source, mainly for research design and interpretation of the findings.

Measures of dependent variables

We use two dependent variables to measure attitudes toward ASC and asylum seekers in general. Both variables are measured by a set of Likert scale statements to capture a more comprehensive scope of attitudes.

The first variable, attitudes toward ASC, is constructed using a Likert scale which covers five statements ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. These statements show a reasonable good internal validity score (Cronbach's alpha =0.699). In order to measure the direction of attitudes, coding of the statements 4 and 5 is reversed so that positive attitudes are associated with higher values.

The following original statements on the Likert scale were used to construct *attASC* for attitudes toward the location of ASC:

1. (+) I would like to see the ASC will be at a more central place in the village.
2. (+) It was a good choice to establish the ASC here.
3. (+) The presence of the ASC brings economic advantages for the municipality.
4. (-) I would like to see that the ASC moves to another village or city.
5. (-) I dislike to be confronted with asylum seekers during my daily activities such as shopping and work.

To construct a good response variable measuring attitudes toward ASC, the scores of these five statements are used. After summing up the scores of these statements, the total scores are divided into three categories. When this rule is applied strictly, scores up to 10 will reflect negative attitudes while scores between 20 and 25 will reflect positive attitudes. Neutral attitude will have a score of 15. This rule, however, leaves 'inconsistent' answers across the

statements undefined, i.e. scores 10–14 and 16–19. Therefore, this rule is slightly relaxed to construct a response variable. The scores up to 13 are classified to reflect negative attitudes, while the scores 18 and higher are considered as positive attitudes. Neutral attitude is attached to scores 14–17. This classification significantly reduces information loss while clearly distinguishing between negative and positive attitudes.

The second variable, attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, is measured with a Likert scale which covers eight statements ranging 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. These statements show a good internal validity score (reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha =0.77). The scores of statement 5 are reversed so that positive attitudes are associated with lower values.

The following original statements on the Likert scale were used to construct *attASYLM* for Attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers:

1. (-) The arrival of asylum seekers in the Netherlands is a threat to our culture.
2. (-) The Netherlands has reduced financial capacity to support the reception of asylum seekers.
3. (-) I am worried that my environment will become worse with the arrival of asylum seekers.
4. (-) I fear that my financial situation will deteriorate due to the presence of asylum seekers.
5. (+) Most asylum seekers come to the Netherlands because their lives are threatened.
6. (-) Most asylum seekers are in fact fortune seekers.
7. (-) The Netherlands should stop the reception of asylum seekers.
8. (-) The Netherlands should receive only asylum seekers with a background similar to Dutch culture.

The response variable measuring attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers is similarly constructed using these eight statements. One important difference is that these statements are formulated in the opposite direction of the earlier five statements whereas lower scores reflect positive attitudes and vice versa. After summing up the scores of all the statements, the total scores are divided into three categories, considering the range of positive and negative scores at the bottom and top of score distribution. Based on the scores of the eight statements, the total scores are classified into three categories: up to 16 reflect positive attitude, 17–24 reflect neutral, and scores 25 and higher indicate negative attitudes.

This classification of attitudes into three categories captures a broad field of attitudes and is more informative about positive and negative attitudes compared to a two-class classification, which has been often applied in earlier studies on attitudes (Hayes and Dowds 2006). Positive attitudes are clearly distinguished from negative attitudes by the middle category (indifferent), which includes the largest part of the sample. Typically, many respondents are indifferent regarding ASC and the admission of asylum seekers.

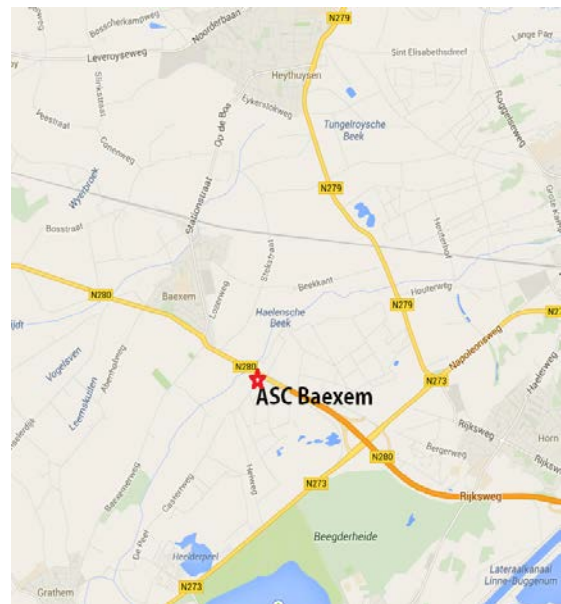


Figure 1. Location of ASCs in the surveyed municipalities

Table 2 gives the distribution of variables over attitudes towards the current location of ASC and the admission of asylum seekers.

In general, residents around ASC have a more positive view of the center than the admission of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. A total of 38 percent of respondents declared that they supported the current location of the ASC, and 24 percent that they supported the admission of asylum seekers in general. On the other hand, 16 and 21 percent of respondents disapprove of the ASC and the general admission policy respectively. The remaining 46 and 55 percent respectively are neutral.

Looking at the correlations with separate variables, having contact with asylum seekers on a voluntary basis (at home, ASC or in public) is positively associated with a positive attitude,

while contact through institutions seems weakly correlated with attitudes. Comparing the locations, respondents in eastern Groningen (Ter Apel and Musselkanaal) are more often negative than the others. Married, older, retired, Christian, healthy, wealthy and resident with higher education levels are in general positive toward ASC and asylum seekers. Also residents who are satisfied with their neighborhood, who are more internationally oriented and who see an economic advantage in the local reception of asylum seekers are more likely to hold positive views. Negative attitudes are strongly correlated with the perception of a threat to Dutch culture and with a disagreement about the admission of asylum seekers in the Netherlands and the current location of ASC.

Table 2. Variables and bivariate distributions

		Attitudes toward current location of ASC			Attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers		
		Negative	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Overall distributions		16.00	45.9	38.1	21.1	54.6	24.3
Contact at home	No	15.7	47.2	37.0	21.4	55.1	23.6
	Yes	18.4	32.9	48.7	18.4	50.6	31.0
Contact at work	No	15.5	47.2	37.3	22.0	54.7	23.3
	Yes	17.7	40.9	41.4	17.7	54.6	27.7
Contact in ASC	No	16.3	46.1	37.6	21.4	55.2	23.5
	Yes	13.1	43.1	43.8	18.3	49.7	32.0
Contact in public	No	19.8	48.8	31.4	23.9	56.7	19.4
	Yes	14.3	44.6	41.1	19.9	53.8	26.4
Contact in the institution	No	15.7	45.9	38.4	21.2	55.0	23.8
	Yes	17.2	45.6	37.2	20.4	52.9	26.6
Place	Groningen-Ter Apel	21.9	41.2	36.9	34.2	48.1	17.7
	Groningen-Musselkanaal	23.2	54.5	22.3	29.6	55.8	14.6
	Friesland-Burgum	15.3	41.2	43.5	15.8	52.5	31.6
	Friesland-Hurdegaryp	7.2	47.3	45.5	13.2	59.9	27.0
	Friesland-AndersBurgum	13.5	43.2	43.2	13.0	60.9	26.0
	Limburg-Baexem	11.1	52.8	36.1	16.7	55.6	27.8
	Limburg-Heythuysen	18.2	42.8	39.0	20.9	55.1	24.1
Limburg-Horn/Grathem	9.3	53.1	37.7	19.1	54.3	26.5	
Gender	Man	16.4	44.6	39.1	21.0	53.2	25.8
	Woman	15.7	46.8	37.5	21.1	55.8	23.1
Marital status	Unmarried	21.3	46.5	32.3	24.2	52.1	23.7
	Married	14.2	45.7	40.2	20.0	55.5	24.5
Child	No	16.1	44.5	39.4	22.9	52.8	24.4
	Yes	15.8	47.8	36.4	18.5	57.3	24.2
Age	16–35 years old	24.2	48.8	27.0	24.9	53.0	22.1
	36–60 years old	15.6	43.9	40.6	19.2	56.5	24.3
	61–80 years old	12.0	46.5	41.5	21.2	53.4	25.5
Education	Low	19.0	47.6	33.4	24.7	54.6	20.6
	Med	19.6	47.6	32.9	26.8	53.2	20.0
	High	7.1	41.2	51.7	8.7	56.3	35.0
Christian	No	18.6	45.7	35.7	23.4	52.1	24.6
	Yes	11.9	46.1	42.0	17.6	58.6	23.8
Newcomer	No	15.5	45.8	38.7	21.2	57.2	21.7
	Yes	17.0	46.0	37.0	20.9	49.4	29.6
Retired	No	18.0	45.9	36.2	21.5	54.8	23.7
	Yes	10.9	45.7	43.3	19.9	54.3	25.8
Employed	No	16.0	46.1	37.9	22.5	53.8	23.7
	Yes	16.0	45.7	38.4	19.8	55.4	24.8
Unhealthy	No	14.6	46.7	38.7	19.4	55.7	24.9

	Yes	22.1	42.2	35.7	28.9	49.7	21.4
Attractive house	No	22.4	43.8	33.9	28.3	50.7	21.1
	Yes	12.2	47.1	40.7	16.8	57.0	26.2
Satisfied with the neighborhood	No	24.8	51.7	23.5	35.3	49.6	15.1
	Yes	14.5	44.9	40.7	18.7	55.5	25.9
Orientation	Nation	34.5	42.5	23.0	48.3	41.8	10.0
	Neutral	15.0	50.6	34.4	19.5	60.3	20.2
	International	2.8	31.1	66.1	2.1	45.5	52.5
Threat to Dutch culture	Disagree	5.8	39.5	54.6	2.5	55.8	41.7
	Neutral	15.7	58.6	25.7	21.5	70.1	8.5
	Agree	34.2	48.9	17.0	56.3	42.1	1.6
No more asylum seekers	Disagree	6.5	44.5	49.1	5.5	60.1	34.4
	Neutral	18.6	62.1	19.4	30.2	64.5	5.2
	Agree	45.6	38.9	15.5	70.6	29.1	0.3
ASC should move	Disagree	3.9	45.6	50.5	12.4	57.9	29.8
	Neutral	25.5	66.0	8.5	30.9	59.6	9.6
	Agree	81.1	15.7	3.1	69.2	24.5	6.3
Uncomfortable with asylum seekers	Disagree	5.1	47.1	47.9	12.6	58.1	29.4
	Neutral	40.7	55.5	3.9	40.7	56.6	2.8
	Agree	71.6	27.7	0.7	72.3	24.3	3.4
Economic advantages through ASC	Agree	4.6	33.7	61.7	17.7	55.9	26.5
	Neutral	14.6	52.7	32.7	15.2	54.6	30.2
	Disagree	35.3	56.5	8.3	33.4	52.8	13.8

N=1,627

Explaining attitudes toward nearby ASCs

We examined the driving forces behind attitudes using regression analyses. Considering the three-category nature of the response variables, a multinomial logit estimator is used, assuming that this variable is nominal and it satisfies the assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA).

We have estimated the probability of having negative and positive attitudes toward the ASC and asylum seekers with respect to neutral attitudes. To better understand the role of separate variables, we start with a baseline model including only five forms of contact with asylum seekers (see Table 2). We add location, distance, demographic, household and socio-economic characteristics in model 2. Model 3 also includes neighborhood satisfaction and international orientation. The most extensive model 4 includes two additional opinion variables that are used to construct the macro level *attASYLM* variable: ending admission of asylum seekers (statement 7) and perceived threat to Dutch culture (statement 1).

Table 3 presents the results. For the sake of simplicity, we present relative risk ratios (RRR) which are in fact odds ratios for multinomial logit models. The reference point for RRR is 1; for coefficients it is 0. If the RRR for a variable is higher than 1, this indicates a higher probability of being in the associated state with respect to the reference state. In case of $RRR < 1$, the probability of being in the associated state is lower with respect to the reference state. Considering the first model, for example, the RRR for contact at home is 1.804 for negative attitudes and 1.856 for positive ones. This means that individuals who have contact with asylum seekers at home are more likely either negative or positive with respect to the state neutral. In other words, the odds of being in the negative and positive states are 1.8 times higher than the neutral state.

Looking at the RRR's for types of personal contacts, three types of contacts are significantly correlated with attitudes toward ASCs. Individuals who have contact with asylum seekers at home are more likely either negative or positive, compared to neutral attitudes. Individuals who have contact with asylum seekers at work more likely hold negative attitudes compared to neutral attitudes but they are not less likely positive. Their positive attitudes do not differ significantly from neutral attitudes. Contacts at a public space are significantly positively correlated with positive attitudes. The estimated RRR's are pretty similar across the models and their significance levels remain stable. The contact variables are not correlated with our independent variables, i.e. the effects of contact are robust for all background variables. These estimates largely confirm the first hypothesis (H1), which refers to a positive correlation between informal personal contacts at home and public spaces and positive attitude toward ASC as well as the negative correlation between workplace contacts and positive attitudes. Interestingly, home contacts are also associated with negative attitudes. This suggests personal contact with asylum seekers is in itself not necessarily associated with positive attitudes.

Considering the effect of socioeconomic background, two variables are statistically significant: education and attractiveness of home. The look of the home is used as an indicator of affluence. The coefficient for higher education indicates that the group with highest education level (college degree or higher) is less likely to be negative and more likely to be positive toward ASC. The attractive house coefficient is significant only for negative attitudes. People with an attractive house are less likely negative but they are not necessarily positive. These findings clearly confirm the second hypothesis (H2) which links a strong socio-economic position to positive attitudes toward asylum seekers and vice versa.

Our findings for the variable distance between the residential location and the location of ASCs are not statistically significant. This suggests that there is no solid evidence to back the presumed negative correlation between location of residence and ASC. People who are living closer to an ASC are not necessarily more negative or less positive toward asylum seekers because they may bear a larger share of the direct burdens of asylum seekers. They have obviously little objections to an ASC in their vicinity. This finding clearly rejects our NIMBY hypothesis (H4). To further assess this finding, we ran different versions of models considering distance variable location in non-linear forms and excluding location fixed effects, but the outcomes did not change our conclusion.

As the results for the variable measuring threat to Dutch culture are tested, the RRR for this variable is highly significant and confirms the third hypothesis (H3). Individuals who see the arrival of asylum seekers in the Netherlands as a threat to Dutch culture are more likely negative and less likely positive. Strikingly, the inclusion of this variable, and other opinion variables, did not change the values of other parameters significantly. This means that the effect of perceived threat is beyond the all background variables included in our models. If it was more prevalent among the less affluent as commonly believed, its effect should have disappeared after controlling for socio-economic background.

The assessment of location-based effects gives a mixed picture about attitudes. Residents of the villages Hurdegaryp and Horn/Grathem, located further away from ASCs, are less likely

to be negative than Ter Apel, the reference. However, these residents are not necessarily more positive than the reference group. The residents of the two other villages located near ASCs, Musselkanaal and Baexem, are less likely to express positive attitudes than people from Ter Apel. The findings also hold true for the residents of Horn/Grathem. As mentioned in data section, Ter Apel hosts the largest facility, ASC while Musselkanaal and Baexem are villages with a relatively small ASC. It is reasonable to expect that the residents of Ter Apel might more likely express negative and less likely positive attitudes because the risk of nuisance, sense of threat and anxiety would be probably the greatest. We also expected that residents of other villages further away from ASCs would be less positive. This assumption was not confirmed. There is even no indication of any difference in attitudes between Ter Apel and Burgum, the village with ASC hosting families with minors, perhaps the ASC location with the least ‘problems’ among all surveyed locations. Strikingly, their responses are also less likely to be positive, which looks like a support for NIMBY hypothesis. However, residents in almost all locations, except Heythuysen, are less likely to have negative attitudes than those in Ter Apel, the reference category. These results suggest that the residential distance from ASC is of minor importance in shaping attitudes toward ASCs. It is likely that some other unobserved location characteristics play a more important role.

Our qualitative data sheds some light on the differences between locations. Musselkanaal and Ter Apel are two very close but quite different locations. A high concentration of residents with low social and economic profile, and prevailing pessimism and desperation are possibly the reason behind the more negative attitudes toward ASC in Musselkanaal. On the other hand, less positive attitudes in the Limburg region, Baexem, Heythuizen and Horn/Grathem are likely a regional issue, connected to the recently emerging anti-immigration sentiments. The anti-immigration Party for Freedom (PVV) of Geert Wilders gained significant support in this region. It is worth to note that the residents of this region are not necessarily more negative. The residents of Horn/Grathem are even less likely hold negative views. The apparently more neutral attitudes in this region could be interpreted as passive support for the reception of asylum seekers in this region.

When other control variables in the models are considered, a couple of results stand out. Among demographic characteristics, only age is statistically significant. Strikingly, young people (16–35 years old) hold more negative attitudes toward ASC. This confirms the earlier finding of Lubbers et al. (2006), who found that young people are more likely to object to an ASC project than older respondents. This implies that young people see asylum seekers in their neighborhood more likely as a threat and new actors in a competition for scarce resources. Alternatively, young residents could have more negative contacts with the asylum seekers who may be engaged in crime or just general youthful behavior such as hanging out.

Our estimates for the remaining opinion variables are in line with expectations, and are very pronounced. Residents who are satisfied with their neighborhood are positive towards ASC. International-oriented individuals are significantly less likely negative and more likely positive compared to those who have a clear national orientation. Neutral individuals, without a national or international orientation, are less likely negative but not significantly positive. Respondents who are against the admission of more asylum seekers have also significantly

more negative attitudes toward ASCs. The distinctive feature of these findings is that the impact of the mentioned opinion variables is very large on attitudes, given the other observed background variables.

Table 3. Multinomial logit analysis of attitudes towards ASC (RRR, neutral as base category)

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
		Negative				Positive			
Contact	at home	1.804**	1.796**	1.827**	1.805*	1.856***	1.796***	1.854***	1.886***
	at work	1.356*	1.590**	1.533**	1.713**	1.172	1.156	1.201	1.232
	at ASC	0.675	0.644	0.621	0.833	1.007	0.934	0.929	0.888
	in public space	0.746*	0.852	0.829	0.959	1.388***	1.274*	1.278*	1.296*
	at school or sports club	1.039	0.959	1.025	1.041	0.793	0.834	0.828	0.841
Location	1 Ter Apel (Ref)								
	2 Musselkanaal		0.831	0.789	0.753		0.448***	0.482***	0.464***
	3 Burgum		0.740	0.796	0.812		0.991	0.893	0.787
	4 Hurdegaryp		0.430**	0.474*	0.446*		0.827	0.710	0.622*
	5 AndersBurgum		0.900	1.066	0.961		0.912	0.794	0.781
	6 Baexem		0.457*	0.556	0.612		0.478**	0.405***	0.365***
	7 Heythuysen		1.307	1.332	1.328		0.689	0.632*	0.575*
	8 Horn/Grathem		0.428**	0.431**	0.418**		0.584**	0.532**	0.493***
	Distance from ASC (km)		0.938	0.938	0.938		1.018	1.032	1.050
Demography and Household	Woman		0.873	0.898	0.898		0.938	0.987	0.997
	Married		1.051	0.963	0.963		1.032	1.042	1.088
	Child in household		0.768	0.814	0.814		0.866	0.895	0.879
	Christian		0.783	0.866	0.866		1.140	1.089	1.089
	Unhealthy		1.446*	1.378	1.378		1.004	1.046	1.066
	Newcomer		0.892	0.891	0.891		0.879	0.856	0.797*
	Age 16–35 years old		2.027**	2.105**	2.105**		0.739	0.728	0.722
	Age 36–60 years old		1.318	1.365	1.365		1.227	1.294	1.293
	Age 61–80 years old (ref.)								
SEP	Education Low (ref.)								
	Education Medium		1.012	1.004	1.004		0.960	0.953	0.921
	Education High		0.498***	0.580**	0.580**		1.672***	1.420**	1.179
	Retired		0.662	0.703	0.703		1.292	1.294	1.236
	Employed		0.754	0.750	0.750		1.142	1.142	1.105
	Attractive house		0.626***	0.647***	0.647***		1.013	0.971	0.954
Satisfied	with neighborhood			0.837	0.837			1.774***	1.701***
Orientation	National								
	Neutral			0.425***	0.651**			1.186	0.854
	International			0.144***	0.368**			3.419***	1.868***
No more asylum seekers	Disagree (ref.)								
	Neutral				1.469*				0.440***
	Agree				5.222***				0.706
Threat to Dutch culture	Disagree (ref.)								
	Neutral				1.454				0.403***
	Agree				2.512***				0.324***
	Constant	0.384***	0.923	1.965	0.215***	0.624***	0.619	0.273***	0.764
	ll	-1.6e+03	-1.5e+03	-1.5e+03	-1.1e+03				
	aic	3302	3188	3047	2375				
	bic	3367	3479	3370	2762				
	r2_p	0.011	0.066	0.108	0.307				
	N	1627	1618	1611	1590				

* p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01

Explaining attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers

Attitudes toward having an ASC nearby may be rooted in local context as argued. On the other hand, attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers on the national level may be driven by some general concepts such as nationalistic ideologies or racial, ethnic antagonism.

If indeed residents are more likely to have negative attitudes toward asylum seekers at the local level than at the national level, the findings would support the NIMBY hypothesis. However, the descriptive statistics indicate the opposite: the likelihood of having negative attitudes toward ASCs is lower than the likelihood of having negative attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers on the national level (see table 2). These differences, however, can be eliminated by our observed variables if attitudes are correlated with demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the local residents.

We will examine now the probability of negative and positive attitudes towards the more general measure, the admission of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. Again, the strength of the neutral attitudes serves as a reference. Similar to the attitudes toward ASCs, we utilize four different models, adding stepwise the groups of variables. In this analysis, the set of variables is only different for the fourth model. For the first three models the same variables are used, allowing us to compare the effects of explanatory variables on attitudes toward asylum seekers between the local and the national level. The last model (model 4), however, includes three different variables. The first variable measures attitudes regarding location: ‘ASC should move to another location’ (statement 4). The second variable measures the degree of feeling comfortable when meeting asylum seekers in public space (statement 5). Another variable measures whether a person perceives economic advantages of having an ASC in their community. These variables link local context to attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers on the national level.

Table 4 shows the results from multinomial logit assessment of attitudes toward the admission of asylum seekers. Compared to the measurements of attitudes on the location of ASC, these are less pronounced. Any sort of contact with asylum seekers has no significant effect on attitudes toward their admission. Only locations in Friesland seem to have less likely negative attitudes. Differences in the likelihood of positive attitudes are not statistically significant. Newcomers, i.e. residents who did not grow up in the current location but moved in later, are more likely to have positive attitudes. The effects of the variables measuring socio-economic position are quite similar to the results in table 3. Individuals with higher education, residents living in an attractive house and residents with high neighborhood satisfaction are less likely to hold negative attitudes. On the national level, young people do not show significantly different views than old people. This finding underlines the conclusion of perceived competition and threat by young people at the local level.

The opinion variables indicate similar effects as in the local case. Residents who feel uncomfortable to encounter asylum seekers in public area and who oppose the admission of asylum seekers and who do not see any economic advantage of the ASC in their vicinity are more likely to report negative and less likely to report positive opinions. The attitudes of residents with an international orientation are shaped the other way around. They are more likely to have a positive and less likely a negative view of asylum seekers. Regarding the large size of this effects and their robustness to all our observed variables, these opinion variables point to persistent anti-immigration attitudes at both levels, as suggested social psychological theories.

Table 4. Multinomial logit analysis of attitudes towards the admission of asylum seekers in the Netherlands (RRR, neutral as base category)

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
		Negative				Positive			
Contact	at home	0.979	0.984	0.976	0.863	1.240	1.171	1.176	1.149
	at work	0.811	0.949	0.864	0.780	1.047	0.985	1.037	1.003
	at ASC	1.005	1.072	1.094	1.210	1.328	1.141	1.137	1.265
	in a public space	0.897	1.276	1.243	1.207	1.377**	1.204	1.181	1.239
	at school or sports club	1.077	1.187	1.289	1.237	0.983	0.972	0.975	1.014
Location	1 Ter Apel (Ref)								
	2 Musselkanaal		0.758	0.639*	0.733		0.859	0.970	0.899
	3 Burgum		0.382***	0.389***	0.524**		1.652**	1.655**	1.420
	4 Hurdegaryp		0.413***	0.475**	0.592		0.946	0.827	0.733
	5 AndersBurgum		0.391***	0.423***	0.419**		1.072	0.974	0.878
	6 Baexem		0.352**	0.405**	0.515		1.407	1.313	1.279
	7 Heythuysen		0.786	0.760	0.700		0.932	0.930	0.866
	8 Horn/Grathem		0.646	0.607	0.765		1.236	1.186	1.186
Distance	from ASC (km)		0.934	0.934	0.998		1.047	1.070	1.070
Demography and Household	Woman		0.972	0.963	0.979		0.883	0.918	0.901
	Married		0.901	0.794	0.814		0.926	0.948	0.945
	Child in household		0.766*	0.798	0.787		0.945	0.975	0.928
	Christian		0.791	0.960	0.977		0.847	0.803	0.760*
	Unhealthy		1.320	1.227	1.150		0.973	1.043	0.931
	Newcomer		1.106	1.073	1.167		1.566***	1.558***	1.653***
	Age 16–35 years old		0.917	0.954	0.667		0.736	0.731	0.861
	Age 36–60 years old		0.701	0.729	0.650		0.825	0.866	0.951
SEP	Education Low (ref.)								
	Education Medium		1.235	1.249	1.344*		0.964	0.932	0.971
	Education High		0.409***	0.496***	0.602**		1.507***	1.198	1.206
	Retired		0.749	0.842	0.978		1.139	1.185	1.234
	Employed		0.992	1.034	1.151		1.098	1.132	1.124
	Attractive house		0.675***	0.713**	0.807		1.048	1.022	1.021
Satisfied	with neighborhood			0.576***	0.703*			1.331	1.286
Orientation	National								
	Neutral			0.333***	0.378***			1.419	1.300
	International			0.055***	0.082***			4.625***	3.816***
ASC should move	Disagree								
	Neutral				1.942***				0.404***
	Agree				5.523***				0.754
Uncomfortable with asylum seekers	Disagree								
	Neutral				2.154***				0.135***
	Agree				5.662***				0.432*
Economic advantages of ASC	Advantages								
	Neutral				0.864				1.221
	No advantages				1.500**				0.646**
	Constant	0.428***	1.433	5.330***	1.091	0.332***	0.273***	0.110***	0.158***
	ll	-1.6e+03	-1.5e+03	-1.4e+03	-1.2e+03				
	aic	3267	3156	2933	2599				
	bic	3331	3447	3256	2986				
	r2_p	0.005	0.060	0.128	0.228				
	N	1627	1618	1611	1591				

* p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01

Conclusions

This paper examines attitudes of residents toward asylum seekers in a small local context using four unique survey datasets, collected within a 10 km radius of four asylum seekers centers. We assess the likelihood of respondents holding having positive and negative

attitudes with respect to neutral attitudes. This approach was selected as it helps represent the likelihood of holding one of the two extreme views with respect to neutral, without inflating the effects. .

The analysis provides three major conclusions about sources of negative and positive attitudes. First, personal contacts with asylum seekers at work strengthen negative attitudes towards ASCs, while contacts at public space are associated with a higher likelihood of having positive attitudes. This confirms our first hypothesis of a positive correlation between personal contacts and positive attitudes, also following contact theory. Personal contacts with asylum seekers at home are correlated with both having negative and positive attitudes with respect to neutral. This interesting result may indicate failed and successful attempts to make close contacts with asylum seekers.

Second, there is a clear correlation between socio-economic status and attitudes. Persons with a stronger socio-economic position are significantly less likely to hold negative attitudes towards both having an ASC nearby and the admission of asylum seekers, as predicted by ethnic competition theory. In particular, people with a completed college or university education are more likely to hold positive attitudes and less likely to hold negative attitudes, compared to those with low and medium education.

Third, people who live closer to ASCs, and hence are more likely to face the social burdens of asylum seekers, are not necessarily more negative towards ASCs than people who live further away. This finding suggests a negation of the NIMBY hypothesis, at least when strictly considering a 10 km radius. However, we find indirect and weak support for this hypothesis as the estimates of attitudes toward both the location of ASCs and the admission of asylum seekers are considered and the distance limit of within 10 km is relaxed. Young people are more likely to have negative attitudes toward an ASC in their vicinity than old people. Newcomers, i.e. residents who did not grow up in the community and moved in later, have positive attitude toward the admission of asylum seekers on the national level, but they have similar attitude towards ASCs at the local level as their local peers.

Finally, some opinions persist even with all the observed individual and contextual variables important for shaping attitudes held constant. People who perceive asylum seekers as a threat to Dutch culture, and those people who are national-oriented and who have a predetermined negative attitude toward asylum seekers, are more likely negative and less likely positive at both local and national levels. On the other hand, internationally oriented respondents displayed much more positive attitudes toward migrants. Also people who see economic advantages in hosting ASCs are more positive and less negative. Since the impact of these opinion variables is strong and robust, we tend to interpret the effects of these variables as an ideological issue. Attitudes are possibly largely shaped by social identity considerations.

Overall, our findings suggest that attitudes toward asylum seekers are not more negative in small rural locations hosting an asylum seekers center, compared national average. Tightly knit and culturally conservative communities are not necessarily strongly opposed to the admission of asylum seekers. Attitudes toward asylum seekers at the local context are shaped by socio-economic position, international orientation, interpersonal contacts, perceived threat on Dutch culture and perceived economic benefits of ASCs.

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